



AETC News Clips

Randolph AFB, Texas



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30 Aug 05

AF issues guidelines on religion

Rules discourage evangelism in wake of flap at academy.

By LAURIE GOODSTEIN

NEW YORK TIMES

The Air Force issued new religion guidelines to its commanders Monday that caution against promoting any particular faith — or even “the idea of religion over nonreligion” — in official communications or functions such as meetings, sports events or ceremonies.

The guidelines discourage public prayers at official Air Force events or meetings other than worship services — one of the most contentious issues for many commanders.

But the guidelines allow for “a brief nonsectarian prayer” at special ceremonies like those honoring promotions, or in “ex-

traordinary circumstances” that include “mass casualties, preparation for imminent combat and natural disasters.”

The Air Force developed the guidelines after allegations that evangelical Christians wield so much influence at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs that anti-Semitism and other forms of religious harassment have become pervasive.

An Air Force task force concluded some students and staff at the school have the perception that the academy favors evangelical Christians and is intolerant of those who do not share their faith.

The new guidelines apply not just to the academy, but to the entire Air Force. They will be made final this year when Air Force generals meet and consider any recommendations they hear from commanders.

“We support free exercise of religion, but we do not push religion,” said Rabbi Arnold Resni-

coff, a Navy veteran who helped write the guidelines. “I think many of the people I spoke to maybe should have known this already, but they were operating based on misperceptions.”

Resnicoff, hired this year as a special assistant to the secretary and chief of staff of the Air Force, said some Air Force members he had spoken with “mistakenly assumed” that because the military encourages “spiritual strength as a pillar of leadership,” they were given license to promote strong belief in Christianity within the military.

Two Democrats in Congress who had criticized the Air Force Academy, Rep. Steve Israel of New York and Rep. Lois Capps of California, cautiously welcomed the guidelines.

“It’s actually a refreshing acknowledgment by the Air Force that it had real problems that needed to be corrected. It’s a good step forward,” said Israel, a member of the House Armed

Services Committee.

However, one outspoken critic, academy graduate Mikey Weinstein of Albuquerque, N.M., said the guidelines mean nothing because the Air Force had refused to discipline officers who overstepped the boundaries.

“All this does is increase the level of confusion,” he said.

The guidelines try to balance the constitutional requirement of free religious expression with limits on government endorsement of religion.

The guidelines say, “Supervisors, commanders and leaders at every level bear a special responsibility to ensure their words and actions cannot reasonably be construed as either official endorsement or disapproval of the decisions of individuals to hold particular religious beliefs or to hold no religious beliefs.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

San Antonio Express News

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AETC News Clips

Sheppard AFB, Texas



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Hard to say goodbye

Love ones gather to see troops from Sheppard Air Force Base off to war

By Michael Hines/Times Record News
August 30, 2005

As she prepared to deploy to Iraq, Michelle Hedrick's last gestures to her husband were passionate.

Her last words were practical.

"We have horses, so she gave me some last minute horse stuff to do," said James Hedrick, 36-year-old instructor at Sheppard Air Force Base. "And she told the kids to be good."

It was a familiar situation for a family that had endured five deployments between the couple. That didn't make the situation any easier, James Hedrick said. His wife was in tears as the two blew kisses to each other after she boarded a bus.

"I don't know about 'easier,' " he said. "You get used to it, but it gets harder each time."

James Hedrick joined dozens of friends, family and fellow Air Force personnel Monday morning as they rallied for deploying troops. Twenty-four members of the 82nd Medical Group deployed to support Operation Iraqi Freedom. Also going were a communications expert and a computer expert. In all, 35 medical personnel have deployed since Aug. 22. The latest group will be gone at least four months.

Rounding the corner of the 82nd Medical Group clinic, the group marched in step while the crowd cheered.

It was an impressive greeting, said Maj. Glenda Mitchell, troop commander.

"It was absolutely awesome," she said. "It was a great feeling."

For the past year and a half, the base has had three similar-sized deployments. Sheppard Air Force Base has sent two 13-person teams and several duos or individuals during the same time.

The deployment was Mitchell's first excursion, and she said the support helped.

"Part of accomplishing our mission is knowing we have the support of our family and community support," she said.

But families shared jitters about the upcoming mission.

Charlotte Williams, 34, said she had one concern as she watched her husband, Ronnie Williams, prepare to leave.

"That he'll be OK," she said, "and that he'll be safe."

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Dave Desmond, 47, took comfort in knowing that his son-in-law, Jeremy Brunelle, would be prepared.

"I've known Jeremy since he was 7, so he's like a son to me," Desmond said. "As a dad, it's difficult at times, but then again, I know Jeremy. He's going to be fine."

The medical group Col. Mike Miller told the group that they should be proud.

"We're very proud of all of you today. You're 24 individuals but you're one team," he said. "This is what we're about."

James Hedrick's last words to his wife summed up much of the feeling for many in the crowd.

"I told her to be safe over there," he said. "And that I'll see her in a couple of months."



AETC News Clips

Vance AFB, Okla.



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Efforts for Vance should help with other projects

The Enid News and Eagle

29 August, 2005

A report last week revealed the city of Enid has spent nearly \$4 million in its protection efforts for Vance Air Force Base before the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process. When you look at the \$200 million-plus impact the base has on Enid and northwest Oklahoma each year, that \$4 million is a pretty sound investment.

Yet, there always are going to be those who complain the city spends too much time and effort on Vance, that it neglects other areas of the city, etc. Those folks are just plain wrong.

First of all, Vance Air Force Base can't help but be a major player in a town and an area that has a retail base of about 55,000. It's not a fool's mission to concentrate on working to keep the base vital and to support enhancement of missions there. Vance is a major employer in town, both for military and the private sector.

Second, the city has not neglected other economic development opportunities. City and business leaders have realized Enid must diversify, and much has been done over the last 10 years to improve medical facilities and other industries, such as Advance Food Co. and Mid-America Wholesale, plus others. Now, city, business and agriculture leaders are focusing on taking advantage of opportunities to improve agriculture. The announcement last Friday Enid will be the location of the state's first major ethanol plant is a great boost in the arm.

Success begets success. That \$4 million investment in Vance and the good news the base will remain open and gain missions means businesses and entrepreneurs feel more positive about investing in the community. Each successful venture makes other ventures more possible.

We applaud the success of the Vance Development Authority. VDA's focus is a textbook example of how to build and execute an economic development effort. In fact, we'd like to see other economic development efforts in Enid and northwest Oklahoma modeled after VDA.

Think what could be accomplished if Enid could take the VDA model and make Enid the economic development leader in northwest Oklahoma. The opportunities could be endless.

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BRAC commission OKs Vance expansion

The Enid News and Eagle, Page 1

By Jeff Mullin Senior Writer

27 August, 2005

In a unanimous vote, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted Friday to expand the mission of Vance Air Force Base, ending two days of uncertainty and anxiety for base supporters.

The commission voted 9-0 to approve Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recommendation to move the undergraduate pilot training mission from Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Ga., and divide it among Vance, Columbus AFB in Mississippi and Laughlin AFB near Del Rio, Texas. Vance also will receive some of Moody's Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training and Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals training for pilots and weapons systems officers.

In all, Vance is slated to pick up at least 99 new jobs (93 military and six civilian) along with 13 T-6 and 12 T-38 aircraft.

"We can pop the cork," said Mike Cooper, chairman of Vance Development Authority and Oklahoma Strategic Military Planning Commission. "We're still standing. The last 48 hours have been incredible."

One of the commission's most difficult decisions surrounded Cannon Air Force Base near Clovis, N.M., recommended for closure by the Pentagon.

Retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd "Fig" Newton, a member of the commission and former wing commander at Vance, came up with a plan to save Cannon that involved moving the IFF mission from Moody to Cannon. That proposal was defeated by commissioners just minutes before they approved the action concerning Vance.

Cooper and VDA consultants J.B. Davis and Stephen Moffitt spent much of Thursday and Friday working behind the scenes, trying to convince the commission to stick with Rumsfeld's initial plan for Vance. Davis is a retired Air Force general and a member of the 1995 BRAC commission. Moffitt is a former aide to ex-Oklahoma Sen. Don Nickles and served as deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Senate affairs.

"It is a testament to our ability to be able to give prompt and immediate input to the commission and its staff," said Cooper. "Up until they made those decisions, at least we were able to give our side."

Vance also will become the home of an \$8.7 million Armed Forces Reserve Center. The commission voted to close 53 state National Guard Armories and create these seven such reserve centers, construction of which is supposed to begin in 2009.

"This is a great thing for us," said Cooper. "We are getting the Army Guard as an additional mission, the new planes and new people. This will position us well out in the future to bring other things here."

Cooper said there is plenty of credit to go around.

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"The reason we are still standing is because of the outstanding support of the community, the state and the congressional delegation all working in lockstep on the long and short range plan on how we could protect each of our (military) facilities in the state.

The commission must forward its completed list to President Bush by Sept. 8. The president then has until Sept. 23 to approve or veto the list in its entirety, at which case it would go back to the commission for revision. Once the final list is approved, the changes will take place over the next six years.

Cooper said the work of the VDA will not end once the 2005 BRAC process concludes.

"You can't ever take your eye off the ball," he said. "We have to keep doing what we have been doing, telling people what a great work ethic and what great facilities we have."

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